REVIEWS OF NEW FICTION

NOVEL OF INDIA TAGORE'S FIRST PROSE ROMANCE

THE WRECK. By Rabindranath Tagore. The MacMillan Company.

FOR the lover of Tagore's essays and plays his first novel, "The Wreck," will prove a storehouse of golden treasures. All the poetry of his former writings, all the beauty and rhythm of his meditations and the swift action and human interest of his plays are combined in this volume.

It is a romance, with a close adherence to the life and customs of the Hindu, modified by so much of the West as the educated Oriental has absorbed from his modern studies.

Ramesh, a young Hindu law student, is in love with Hemnalini, an educated girl of Brahman family. Ramesh's father forces him into a marriage with another girl, Susila. Then comes the wreck, from which the story received its title. But when the book is closed and the plot is re-enacted in the reader's mind, there seem to be three wrecks—two wrecked lives in addition to the wiping out of the bridal party on its return to Ramesh's home.

Tagore has told the story of a man who finds a bride on the shore after a storm and believes her to be his wife. Being a high minded youth, when he learns that his wife was drowned and that the girl he is beginning to love is not his wife, Ramesh endeavors to protect her from the world and devotes himself to finding her husband, giving no thought to the criticism his actions are bringing upon him.

Kamala, the heroine, is one of the most fascinating girls of 14 or 15 any author could have chosen to portray and Tagore has managed to give an impression of her sweetness, devotion

Tagore—From a drawing by Will Rothenstein.

and obedience without lessening the intense humanity that pulses through her veins.

In the dignified Hemnalini one sees the western education warring with the eastern customs. In every particular she adheres to the Hindu customs except in insisting upon marrying the man she loves.

Her brother, Jogendra, is officious, overbearing, dictatorial, and yet at times he does something kindly so entirely foreign to his character as the reader has conceived it that one cannot help smiling. Tagore does know his people. He can find "the little bit of good" in every "brute" and bring it to the surface at just the moment some situation in human life would call forth this good trait.

When Ramesh learns that Kamala is not his wife he permits himself to become engaged to Hemnalini. The engagement is broken off by Jogendra and a friend of his, Akshay. One might call Akshay the villain, for it is seldom he is not making trouble. He has a mind, though, which when operating justly makes him an avenue for good despite his attempts to bring about evil.

In the hours of sorrow which follow the breaking of the engagement her father, Annada, becomes still dearer to the heart of the motherless girl. Their relationship can best be described in Tagore's own words:

"Annada Babu emerged on to the roof and stood behind her; but she was oblivious of his presence. When at last he went softly up to her and laid his hand on her shoulder she started in surprise and then blushed with confusion; he had seated himself beside her before she could rise to her feet. He waited a moment or two, then sighed deeply. 'If only your mother were alive now! I'm no use to you at all!' This piteous outcry from the old man roused Hemnalini from the semblance of stupor into which she had fallen and her eyes sought her father's face. Oh the love, the sympathy and the pain that she saw there! A sad change had come over his expression in the last few days. It was her old father who had borne the brunt of the storm that had burst over Hemnalini; he had never relaxed his endeavors to alleviate his daughter's distress, and when he had found all his efforts to comfort her unavailing his thoughts had turned to her mother and he had brought out this cry of helplessness from the depths of his loving heart—Hemnalini saw it all in a flash.

"'You were only three then (when mother died) and had just begun to talk. I remember quite well your asking me, "Where mother?" and my saying, "She had gone to her daddy." You did not understand what I meant and you said nothing but just stood and looked solemnly at me. Then you took me by the hand and pulled me into your mother's room. You thought that though the room was empty I should find some clue there to tell me where she was. You knew that your father could do a lot, but you didn't realize that when it came to matters of life and death your big daddy was as ignorant and helpless as a baby. You can realize now how helpless I am! God has given your father the capacity to love you but not to help you!'"

Though the story covers only about a year in the lives of these people, the swift moving current has caught up not only the characters in the book but the reader as well. Through whirlpools of sorrow, up to heights of happiness he goes until it seems that he has been in India and followed Kamala, Ramesh and Hemnalini about for a year and, unknown, has looked into their hearts and minds and joined in their joys and tears.

A real dog

DR. TAM O' SHANTER. By Mabel L. Robinson. E. P. Dutton & Co.

THE charm of this story—and it is a very real charm—is twofold. Its dog hero, Tam, is a good deal of a personality but he is always a dog; never a human being on four legs. He has ideas, a creed of his own, but they are dog ideas; an authentically canine creed. And therein he stands out above most attempts in fiction to deal with animals. His action is in character, including his chewing up the diploma presented to him upon his "graduation," and his interventions in the various episodes of the story are just those to be expected of a high-bred, gentleman dog. Neither are they the accidental interventions of a *canis ex machina;* they are integral parts of the plot, natural and therefore artistic. Furthermore, he shares the stage reasonably with the humans, without taking up too much room.

Secondly, the story has the atmosphere of the life of a girl's college in truthful "values." Merely as a girl's story of incidents of campus life it is unusually successful; neither oversentimentalized nor smartly flippant. And the author is particularly to be congratulated upon having escaped the temptation to weave in any adolescent love story. It is refreshing to find a tale of sound interest that does not even dabble with love's excessively young dream. It is true there is a faint hint of it, in the background of the last scene, but that is held to be, properly, "another story."

The book is made of a series of episodes, in each of which Tam barks or growls or wheedles himself into the action at a critical moment. He begins by curing his future mistress, Margaret, of a tendency toward hysterics, and he acts throughout as a wholesome centre of interest. He warns of the presence of a burglar, reports a fire and saves Margaret from the attack of a bull—all conventional enough plots, but handled with deftness that fully justifies their use. The book deals very sparingly with humorous situations, but that necessary element is not wholly lacking. The keynote of it is sentimental, but soundly so, without any cheapness or misplaced emphasis. Young girls, and dogs, are sentimental creatures, even in our flippant age. Hence the truthfulness of the pictures of this story.

Telling a story backward

BEAUTY. By Rupert Hughes. Harper & Bros.

Reviewed by SUSAN STEELL.

AFTER snubbing many a modern novel because of its conventional form, to object to the innovation Rupert Hughes has made in his most recently published volume of fiction must seem ungracious. Nevertheless as the departure is not warranted by a brilliant success the form may be criticised or noticed with disapproval with the hope that no other writer may be induced to follow it.

Illustration from "Beauty."

Mr. Hughes begins his book with an epilogue and therefore he asks a comparison with a play which did the same thing rather successfully. We refer to "On Trial," where results were shown to the audience before conditions and causes. Such popularity as this *piece de theatre* obtained was one of novelty.

The novelist in his search for something new in his way of telling a story deliberately robs his fiction of whatever elements it might have yielded of genuine interest. These elements evidently cast no sort of spell on him, and one has to read but a few chapters of the book to come to the uncomfortable conclusion that what he is reading is an essay and not a novel at all. The author's course in this is not a true essayist's, but he takes every opportunity to moralize on present day social conditions and standards in what must be termed a somewhat slipshod fashion. He is the shocked observer of short skirts in women and rough manners in both sexes. What he says on either count has been said before more trenchantly but quite as uselessly.

The story part of "Beauty" is then this author's secondary consideration; it is brought in to lighten the sermon and, as might have been expected, the two themes mingle like oil and water. As soon as the water begins to flow—and it does make an interesting and picturesque and hopeful start several times—the author dumps in a full measure of oil and the flow instantly stops. The result is a poor novel and an unconvincing essay.

Essay writing on less hackneyed themes than social mistakes and misfits is a difficult field, as Mr. Hughes, who has had a "shy" at most kinds of writing, very well knows. That he should indulge himself, therefore, in it to the extent of a good third or more of the bulk of his book is surprising. It may be that he feels intensely that our manners are inexcusably coarse; that our intercourse is too generally casual; that we walk badly, dress badly and are without ideals in art and life. So feeling, he could not resist preaching against these degenerating things and no one should object to his freeing his mind once and for all. It is the way he does it that readers will object to—the readers, that is, who have read enough novels and essays to have acquired a standard. And it must be sadly admitted that in neither has this author measured up to a good one. Redundancy, repetition, a flux of adjectives spoil the essay part; a vague characterization destroys the fiction values.

Opening with the epilogue, the body of beautiful Clelia Blakeney is found buried in a cake of ice after a mystifying tragedy. The ice has acted as a preservative and is not supposed to melt until the people she knew and the circumstances which led to her death are dealt with and, so to speak, "brought up to date." Four books or chapters follow that suffice to explain how Gad Larrick, the Texan, near hero who loved Clelia madly, resolves to marry her friend as his next best chance for happiness.

"Gad" reads like a careful study, but his lack of fidelity is disappointing. The most natural and lovable character is the rich young New York man, "Norry" Frewin, who enjoys himself to the limit introducing the Texan to his New York friends and noting his reactions. "Gad" must have quickly drawn the conclusion from the things he saw and heard that "home (Texas) was never like this." He bears up manfully, however, and hesitates only temporarily about mingling his new fortune, a gigantic one, in the metropolis's Pactolian stream. Poor Clelia, if she but knew it, missed a lot of the joy of reckless spending by her early and icy death. There is nothing said to indicate that she wouldn't have grasped the opportunity—she is pictured in so far as she is limned at all as that kind of a girl, and perhaps this is what keeps her taking off from being really poignant. And perhaps, also, the absence of big natured, unselfish and noble persons from the book is what will cause disappointment to Mr. Hughes's large and extending circle of readers, rather than the mixture noted of story and sermon.

The Book Factory

By EDWARD ANTHONY.

ANGELO, LAWRENCE, CEZANNE.

An enthusiastic reviewer classes D. H. Lawrence with Michael Angelo and Cezanne.

Dactyl delightful that pleases the ear,
Galloping measure and joyous,
Romping along like a hare or a deer,
Let not the grouping annoy us.
Whistle it, warble it, yodel it, oh,
Shout it as loud as you can,
These are immortal, let every one know,
Angelo, Lawrence, Cezanne!

Welcome, O musical strain that enthralls,
Little I care if the trio
Carries a ringer—that's something that calls
Forth not a murmur from me, O!
Who is this Lawrence that's sitting in state?
Think I have heard of the man.
Let him remain! This here rhythm is great—
Angelo, Lawrence, Cezanne!

Better than Tinker to Evers to Chance,
Hitting the mark with a bang, O!
Fast as the fastest Swinburnean chants,
Zippy as Spanish fandango.
Worthy refrain for Gilbertean lay,
Never so breezily ran
Phrase as the one I am singing to-day—
Angelo, Lawrence, Cezanne!

Writers of summer fiction could do worse than take a course of study in the charming trifles of E. S. Martin. His "The Courtship of a Careful Man" always seemed to us to be the perfect hammock book.

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Prunella, who is gazing over our shoulder as we rap out this column, wants to know whether we don't think it would be an act of humanity in these torrid times to permit summer books to appear without jackets.

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Speaking of candor, Herbert Jenkins, the English publisher, in his blurb on Patrick MacGill's "Fear," says: "It is superrealism. It gives a wonderful picture of war. It is terrible."

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A Houghton-Mifflin notice asks us—and others—to tell the world that Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, author of "French Perspectives," is leaving her New York home for a 'dobe dwelling in New Mexico.

Anything to be 'dobliging.

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Just as we were wishing some one would give the New York Nationals a good panning for their ragged playing this spring, we ran across, to our delight, William Adams Brown, Jr.'s, "The Groping Giant." . . . Only to discover it's another book on Russia. Gosh.

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If you want some particular book very badly, for which you have searched and searched in vain, let us find it for you.—Book store ad.

Well, to begin with, you might locate our "Green Mansions" and "Old Wives' Tale." The last time we saw them they were on the table in the living room.

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SONNETS OF A BOOK REVIEWER.

XI.

"Short Story Writing," by Professor Friend,
Who ought to know, if anybody ought,
He teaches it at college and has penned
This volume so that those he hasn't taught
May, like the tutored ones, be masters of
This art. The thing is simple, it would seem.
The first essential is, be sure you love
The work. Then get your pencil out and scheme
A novel plot, one that's completely new;
Then people it with persons who are real.
No motion picture characters will do.
Throw in suspense, surprise and heart appeal.
A bit of humor—say a page or so—
And that is all there's to it. Simple, no?

XII.

Another international intrigue—
A plot to steal a Swedish battleship
And sell it to the Portuguese. The League
Of Nations ought to interfere. I'll tip
'Em off, at any rate. This lawless book,
"Count Brazenfeller's Ruse," is full
Of monkey business that they ought to look
Into. These European crooks will pull
The nations into war unless they're checked.
Why, in this book alone they steal a rich
Heiress, purloin a vessel (it is wrecked
In desperation later), boil in pitch
A Consul and—but gosh, I'm wasting time.
*By now you know the School of Opheim**

*E. Phillips.

XIII.

A stack of summer fiction—"breezy" stuff,
The dainty girly covers all explain.
Breezy is right, I'll say. There's wind enough
In these to fly a kite from here to Spain.
Now, if the wind were cool, I wouldn't care.
It's hot air I object to, in July
Especially. Windbags are pretty rare
That hold the kind of cooling breezes I
Am fond of. I prefer to stick my knob
Beneath a pump and get refreshed that way.
Who'er he is, the chap who has the job
Of making up these books has gone astray.
The covers should be larger, then a man
On stuffy days could use em for a fan.

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CARLO ATTACKED.

Carlo Knight, the indomitable free lance, has been criticised by one of our readers. "He'll do anything to make a nickel—write car card slogans, hair tonic ads, ballyhoos for Coney Island barkers—anything at all," this man indignantly said. "He is devoid of standards. He is a literary swine, a disgrace to the writing profession."

When we called the complaint to Carlo's attention, he remarked, as he sharpened his pencil to write a sardine rondeau for the Immaculate Packing Company, "Tut! All I need do is refer the gentleman to that delightful Hindu proverb which Arthur Guiterman has rendered as follows:

"The man that hath a trade must work thereat.
The barber, lacking custom, shaved a cat."

LITERARY GEOMETRICS.

Three squareheads running around in circles equal one triangle.

E. A. H. submits the following additions to our list of gay iambic pentameters:

"Fate cannot harm me; I have dined to-day."
"That's all there is; there isn't any more."

"A romance of to-day," is the way an announcement describes a new book. Now you know what it's all about.

By the way, do you know that Uncle Sam is a *litterateur?*

If you haven't forgotten the words of "America," you will recall him as—

Author of liberty.

Drama authority keeps the rules

THE GREEN GODDESS. By William Archer. Alfred A. Knopf.

WHAT is it makes a harmless ice cream soda have the taste of gunpowder on the tongue? What makes the rustle of paper in the silent street going home suddenly seem a dire omen, the telephone booth in the dark hallway for the first time appear a dangerous hiding place for thieves? Why "melledramer," of course—an evening of William Archer's play, "The Green Goddess," which may be at the moment, either read or seen, at the Booth Theatre.

Now Mr. Archer in his classic of the theatre, "Playmaking," asserts that the essence of drama lies in the conflict of will between the different characters. A melodrama, then, should be a sort of superconflict, a gigantic struggle, in which Truth is left gasping in the rear, and Virtue hangs on with dogged persistence until the moment of its final triumph over evil forces, which to the very last have seemed on the point of conquering. In "The Green Goddess" Mr. Archer gives full measure of conflict and thrills, and yet one feels it would be a mistake to take seriously this maider effort of his at playwriting. There is swift dialogue, there is climax, what you will of expertness in managing entrances and exits—the "tactics," that is to say, are impeccable, but for a touch of genius one must look in vain.

For Mr. Archer the thing was too easy. Into his story of two Englishmen and a woman dropped from their wrecked airplane at the mouth of a rajah's cave and thereafter kept prisoners in an Indian fortress he has injected a certain plausibility. His careful following of rules in play construction has not taken away the life of the piece, but neither has it given any new turn to the plot or any unexpected ending to the rajah's unscrupulous career. Whether an author of melodrama would not do better to leave the realm of the lifelike altogether and make his play fantastic—as for instance, "In Darkest Russia," famous melodrama, given at the old Globe Theatre twenty-five years ago—is an open question. Since to give the final joyous triumph of virtue truth must nearly always be stretched, the consistent course would seem to be the removal of melodrama from the region of the possible. But Mr. Archer has chosen to try and make his audience believe this adventure could have happened. The sincere acting of Mr. George Arliss and of Miss Olive Wyndham in the current production immeasurably helps him to succeed.

English prophecy

REVOLUTION: A STORY OF THE NEAR FUTURE IN ENGLAND. By J. D. Beresford. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

THIS book of Mr. Beresford's is disappointing. It is an attempt at prophecy. Mr. Beresford has not developed as large a bump of speculation as H. G. Wells. Although his characters are well constructed, they belong neither to real life nor the world of dreams. They move a little too mechanically through his plot. The story is described as a tale of the near future. It has certain elements of truth in it. The Englishman has a happy faculty for making the best of a bad situation. He has a genius for compromise. Withal he is innately conservative.

In his story of the rise and fall of soviets in a typical English village Mr. Beresford emphasizes the bulldog qualities of John Bull. His hero tries to maintain neutrality and is first suspected and then honored by both sides. The capitalist classes use underhand methods to achieve their victory. At the close of the story nearly everything is as it was in the beginning. Mr. Beresford could not be uninteresting if he tried, but he has not been able to write objectively enough, and his book seems to be intended as propaganda for things as they are. He writes best when his imagination is not led astray by questions which are not concerned with the fundamental elements of human nature.